

Study questions:

Read some or all of the following passages from the story of Moses and consider how each one:-

- (a) continues the covenant between God and his people,
- (b) reveals an aspect of God's nature.

Exodus 1:1-7; 2:23-25 and 3:7-10; 12:12-14; 15:22-26; 19:3-6; 20:1-20 (this is a big one!)

Application:

Our personality and experience often affects our relationship with God. Which characteristics of God do you find you naturally relate to most easily? Is He a close personal friend, to whom you can talk freely; or a powerful Creator to be worshipped from a distance? A raging fire, or a comforting flame? In Kingdom terms, do you think of yourself as a subject or a child of the King? In your obedience to God do you tend to be legalistic or impulsive?

How can we work on the areas of that relationship which are weak? How might we learn from the different experiences of other people?

Prayer:

Pray for yourself or someone on your heart, for a balanced, reverent and loving relationship with our Father God, our Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Mission Prayer Support:

Please pray this week for Ron and Jeanette Happ, our Mission Partners working in Nepal. They are returning to Kathmandu on Nov 5th, and ask for prayer that Ron will get a visa to return to work at the Nursing Campus. Also pray for Nepali Christians during the Hindu festivals next month. The political situation is difficult – there has been an interim government for the last two years, and proposed elections in November are opposed by the main parties.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- The families of Andrea O'Neill, Mike Moore and Audrey Watson (or those you know who are recently bereaved). Please pray for those attending the Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving at St Mark's on Saturday 26th October.

You can listen to past sermons on our website:

<http://www.smch.org.uk/2013-2/>

Many thanks to Ruth Cundy who wrote the study notes for this week



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week Beginning:
13th October 2013

KINGDOM AND COVENANT: MOSES

WORSHIP:

Read Isaiah 57, verse 15. Worship the high and holy Lord, who also chooses to live with and among his people.

READINGS: Exodus 19:1-9; 1 Peter 2:9-10

Which of these images or symbols reflects what you feel about God when you think about him and your relationship with him?

- A parent?
- A friend?
- A powerful king?
- A warrior God?
- An unseen mystery hidden behind a cloud?
- A fire?

All these pictures, and more, are used in the story of Moses to depict his relationship with God; in fact, as we work through the story of Moses, we get a rich, many-faceted picture of the character of God, which really challenges us to keep our minds open... there are always fresh truths to discover!

This sermon series is called Kingdom and Covenant. We're looking again at parts of the Big Story of the Bible – Joseph last week, Moses today – to explore how Kingdom and Covenant can make sense then and now. But the way we perceive these interrelated themes is coloured by our perception of God... a covenant with a friend is obviously quite different from a covenant with a powerful king – so which is the correct way to approach God?

Our Exodus reading is just a snapshot in Moses' long life, but it marks a pivotal point in the story of God's people..... another step forward in their understanding of who God is, another part of the curtain lifted, if you like, in the gradual revelation of his character.

Think of where they were before Moses came onto the scene....

Firstly, with regard to Covenant – previously the great statements of Covenant have been between God and one individual – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – now Moses is charged with mediating that Covenant with the whole people.

Secondly, when the children of Israel went into Egypt, they were just that – 70 members of Israel's (another name for Jacob) extended family. In Exodus 19 God says he will make them into a nation... *'you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'*.

Thirdly, Moses was born into a people in slavery, and now God has used him to bring them out, set them free, and start a new existence with a new identity.

So it's a fresh start, a new beginning... and you may have noticed that exactly the same themes were true for Peter in our second reading in 1 Peter 2: 9-10... *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light....* Christians are Covenant people, serving the Kingdom, who have been set free from the darkness of sin.... That's you and me! It's Jeanette and Ron, and the church in Nepal. So what we learn from Moses is equally relevant to us.

Let's explore this a bit more. God first reveals himself to Moses in the desert, back in ch3... A bush is on fire, and a voice speaks from the flames.... *'don't come any closer, and take off your sandals... this is holy ground. I am the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac, of Jacob'*.

This is the first time, as far as we can tell, that Moses has encountered God, and it is a mind-blowing experience. This is the God of his ancestors, who he has heard about, but never met for himself; the God who made a personal covenant with Abraham, promising that he would be the father of a great nation, that God would be his God; who demanded in response that Abraham and his descendants should consecrate themselves to him alone; a serious and solemn commitment on each side. Now 600 years later, God calls Moses to be the mediator of his renewed Covenant extended now to the whole community. But God's first task for him is to lead His people out of Egypt, out of slavery, to the land promised to Abraham in the original covenant. And in time, it was this event which would become the defining characteristic of the Covenant, *...I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt...* and in 1 Peter... *him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* And Jesus' own words: *this cup is the new covenant in my blood.*

In Kingdom terms, God the King is challenging Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, and Moses is about to be involved in a battle to establish who has the supremacy. One by one, God demolishes the power of the Egyptian gods, contaminating the sacred River Nile, extinguishing the Sun God, and finally demonstrating the power of life and death. God brings his people out as a warrior king, and in establishing a new holy, covenanted nation, he inaugurates his kingdom, with a whole new set of values and priorities.

That's the story in Exodus, but do you see all the parallels with Jesus and us – challenging the gods of our secular society? With Jesus and Christians in Nepal, challenging the gods of another culture?

So imagine the scene at the beginning of our reading in ch19... hundreds of people newly released from slavery, not sure what the future holds, walking with their possessions bundled up on their backs through the arid countryside until at last they come to the foot of a mountain, smoke and cloud swirling around its summit. And as they camp there, they're waiting for something to happen.....

Then Moses went up to God (v3) and the LORD called to him from the mountain... 'this is what you are to say...'

And what he actually says is amazing! From the cloud and the mountain, this all-powerful, holy God says *'I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'*

That picture is of a female golden eagle, who, when her chick is learning to fly, swoops underneath, ready to hold it up on her wings if it falters. That is a picture of how God has brought them out of Egypt – with great power, but with great tenderness. He has kept his side of the covenant not out of duty, but out of love.

Then in v5: *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.'*

God is to be revered and obeyed but this is also a covenant of love, made by One who cares for and treasures his children.

A covenant with this God is not to be undertaken lightly. When the people dutifully respond, *'We will do everything the Lord has said,* the answer comes: *'Consecrate yourselves, wash your clothes, don't come unprepared.'* Because when God ratifies his covenant, he does it in style!

V18 The Lord descended on (Mt Sinai) in fire. The smoke billowed up... the whole mountain trembled... and the sound of the trumpet grew louder...

This is a holy, majestic, terrifying God... who is also compassionate, and as close as an eagle to her fledgling; a God who brings judgement on the gods of Egypt (Ex 12:12) and yet who spoke to Moses face to face as to a friend (Ex 33:11). Can we keep these apparently contradictory truths in tension? Yes, if we are to make sense of the Covenant and Kingdom. Otherwise, look what happens in the narrative of the OT, and our own experience:

If we ignore his majesty, holiness, and 'otherness', there is the temptation to abuse the Covenant, disobey the King, presume on his forgiveness, worship other gods, ignore the reality and seriousness of sin...

If we don't experience his love and compassion and closeness, the Covenant can become legalistic, with no personal relationship, the Kingdom can become a dictatorship, trying to please a hard taskmaster...

Think back to our opening questions – how do we envisage God? And do we need to rebalance our view? Do we experience the awe and wonder of worshipping the Lord of creation as well as knowing the love and security of praying to our Father? Do we live in the knowledge that we are servants of the King, and at the same time his beloved children?

Remember, *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God... what a privilege! And our responsibility? – *that you may declare the praises of him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**